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**Review of J. Frawley and I. McCalman, Eds., Rethinking Invasion Ecologies  
from the Environmental Humanities**

Hall, Marcus

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1 **REVIEW BY MARCUS HALL FOR *Basic and Applied Ecology*, 15 (2014), 720-721.**

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4 **Rethinking Invasion Ecologies from the Environmental Humanities, J. Frawley,**  
5 **I. McCalman (Eds.). Routledge, New York (2014). 288 pages, \$155.00**  
6 **(hardback), \$50.95 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-415-71656-7 (hardback), 978-0-**  
7 **415-71657-4 (paperback)**

8  
9 This book is the first title of a new series by Routledge about the Environmental  
10 Humanities. The fact that a group of environmental humanists chose "invasiveness"  
11 as the first topic of their series is an indication of both the importance of the  
12 concept, and a signal that humanists and social scientists are increasingly joining  
13 natural scientists in efforts to understand key environmental issues. As one reads  
14 through the five sections and fifteen chapters, one needs to ask: are these humanists  
15 simply discussing issues that biologists have already decided are crucial? And to  
16 what degree are the humanists offering wholly new environmental insights that  
17 biologists haven't already identified? The clear answers that emerge are that species  
18 invasion is indeed a human, as well as a biological phenomenon, and that the ways  
19 we describe, manage, and mitigate the invasives and their effects requires us to  
20 investigate changing webs of species relationships, as well as our own changing  
21 biases, assumptions, stories, and projected futures with such creatures. These pages  
22 also remind us that *Homo sapiens* may be the most invasive of species, and in any

1 holistic scenario, humanity's own corporeal selves and activities cannot be excluded  
2 from ecological theorizing.

3

4 By *environmental humanities*, the contributors see themselves as part of a renewed  
5 interest in the "other half" of environmental study, whereby historians, ethicists,  
6 geographers, political ecologists, philosophers, and literature & film critics consider  
7 how, for example, our relationships with indigenous creatures and indigenous  
8 landscapes may alter our judgments of them, how telling the story or background of  
9 a particular invading plant or animal can reveal greater biological understanding of  
10 that creature, or how our very choice of words to describe these species may be  
11 shaping the questions that we ask. The humanities--*Studia humanitatis*--  
12 *Geisteswissenschaften*, as the general project of discovering and *rediscovering* new  
13 ways of thinking, provide invasion biologists with a fresh way for reflecting on their  
14 projects, and this book is to be highly recommended for encouraging conversations  
15 with specialists across the aisle and across the university.

16

17 A brief sampling of the chapters highlight the range of subjects being addressed,  
18 with authors considering what our understanding of invasive species tells us about  
19 resilience, biosecurity, human dominion, belongingness, and historical contingency.  
20 In Chapter 2, Harriet Ritvo explores the experience of acclimatization, or the  
21 purposeful importation of foreign plants and animals for adapting to new lands,  
22 which found special favor in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French and British  
23 colonies--with the unsurprising results that such creatures sometimes escaped their

1 confines to ran rampant across the countryside. Yet chance human decisions meant  
2 that camels, for instance, would multiply to a million individuals in Australia but  
3 would die out in the American Southwest, with the explanation being that camels  
4 were imported earlier in the former continent, thereby co-adapting more  
5 thoroughly with that environment, then later reaping greater protection from  
6 animal rightists. In other Australian and New Zealand chapters--which is the  
7 refreshing and main focus of this book--alien and very invasive prickly pears, gene-  
8 spliced animals, and cane toads are considered from the perspective of writers and  
9 film-makers to see how the literary and visually minded transmit messages about  
10 this particular environmental concern. We learn in Morgan Richards' Chapter 10  
11 that Mark Lewis' artfully filmed "Cane Toads" (1987) and its 3-D same-titled sequel  
12 (2010) have been widely popular, if not controversial, and have certainly brought  
13 the dilemmas of invasion biology to more living rooms than have a collection of high  
14 impact factor journals. Such conclusions remind us that humanists and artists are  
15 key allies for scientists who are searching for better ways to diffuse their results.

16  
17 Perhaps most intriguing for ecologists is Lesley Head's Chapter 6 which considers  
18 ordinary backyard gardens and their keepers as microcosms for our own larger  
19 world filling up with novel ecosystems and foreign organisms. This anthropological  
20 investigation gauges how gardeners' treatment of and attitudes toward "weeds"  
21 may simulate the challenges facing scientists and managers of invasive species:  
22 gardeners, after all, apply continual vigilance to their plots, make hard choices about  
23 favoring or culling certain species, balance aesthetic versus pragmatic concerns, and

1 then learn to expect the unexpected. As the earth increasingly takes on the structure  
2 of humanity's garden--as we increasingly see ourselves as inhabiting the  
3 Anthropocene--it can only be wise to ponder how gardeners have learned (and  
4 continue to learn) to live with a nature-out-of-place. Although some invasion  
5 biologists may deem a few authors of this volume as straying too far beyond the  
6 confines of their stated subject, this group of environmental humanists is to be  
7 praised for showing how invasive species can, in fact, be hitched to almost  
8 everything else in the universe.

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